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UNCLAS DHAKA 000550

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH STRIKE SITREP

Sensitive but unclassified.

1. (SBU) The Awami League's 36-hour hartal (strike) program that ended February 6 left one police officer dead, three other officers injured, 80 civilians hurt and 500 arrested in scattered incidents throughout the country, according to reports. In Dhaka, police used tear gas and clubs to disperse gathered AL processions in several areas throughout the city or to restrict protesters to certain areas. Media reported that several buses were set afire, and dozens of vehicles were damaged.

2. (SBU) After the 36-hour hartal, the AL announced a continued program of hartals in three cities for February 7. After complaints from business owners, the Awami League reduced its planned 3-day hartal in Chittagong to an eight hour, 0600 to 1400 strike. Sources said that while most stores remained closed, there were greater numbers of rickshaws and cars compared to previous hartals and that there were few efforts by picketers to enforce the hartal. As of 1600 local, in Rangamati, located 300 kilometers east of Dhaka, the strike was peaceably observed, while in Sylhet the hartal was ignored.

3. (SBU) Awami League Organizing Secretary, Akhtar Ahktaruzzaman, said the hartals are "working." When asked about the level of violence, he claimed that the government is hiring "hooligans" to instigate confrontations so that the AL would be "blamed." He said that the AL would announce a continued political program tomorrow.
THOMAS